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AUTHOR Savas-Ulkuer, Nurper
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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal research project was initiated in the spring of 1988 in Ankara, Turkey in selected gecekondu settlements. A gecekondu is a hastily constructed dwelling used to house newcomers to large cities. Gecekondu dwellers are predominantly disadvantaged, rural people who have migrated to the fringes of urban areas and whose children usually fail during the first 3 years of school. The research project was designed to implement an ecological early childhood educational model with groups of pregnant mothers and mothers of newborn infants. Previous research had identified reasons teachers and mothers gave for the underachievement of gecekondu children. In order to break the poverty cycle in gecekondus, provision of preschool education was proposed. Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological model of early childhood education seemed most suitable for the gecekondu. Sequential stages of the model involve: (1) provision of adequate housing and economic security before children are born; (2) preparation for parenthood by means of information about child care, nutrition, and health care; (3) facilitation of reciprocal interaction in child-parent relationships in day care centers for children 1-3 years old; (4) exposure of children of 4-6 years to a cognitively oriented preschool program and continuing parental intervention; and (5) assurance of parental support of children's educational activities during elementary school. (RH)

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JULY 13-17 1986

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN TURKISH GECEKONDU

Nurper Savaş-Ülküer*

INTRODUCTION:

"Gecekondu" is a term in Turkish, associated with a building which is constructed hurriedly and hastily in a short span of time. Generally, 'gecekondu' is constructed on unused land which belongs to the government, the municipality, or to someone else. The gecekondu, which is hurriedly constructed without a proper construction plan or a licence is usually neither safe nor suitable to live in. However, the main characteristic of the 'gecekondu' is that it is the home of newcomers to the large and/or industrial cities. In other words, 'gecekondu' is the result of rapid rural-urban migration which is a continuous process in Turkish Society for the last three decades or more (Yörükan 1971; Keleş 1978; Şenyapılı 1978).

The gecekondu dwellers are predominantly village born people and they are previously engaged in agricultural activities. Therefore, they find themselves in a difficulty to find a well paid job in the city as that well paid jobs require a higher education and/or industrial skills. Thus, the gecekondu people are usually under paid, less or non educated, semi rural-semi urban people (Kongar 1973; Yasa 1970; Karpat 1976).

Hence, gecekondu children find themselves born to limited chances. Their environment is not suitable to grow up to become successful and educated adults. Although, their parents want their children to study (usually for girl until secondary school but for boys untill the end of the "education"); they are often reported to be failure (Gökçe, 1971; Öç 1974).

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* Nurper Savaş-Ülküer, Ph.D.(London), Assitant Prof. of Child Development and Education, Gazi University, Faculty of Vocational Education, Dept of Child Development and Education, Ankara,Turkey.

The younger children are also found to be underachievers at schools. Şemin (1975) Reports that majority of primary school children fail during the first three years of schooling. The considerable proportion of the underachievers is from disadvantaged homes i.e the gecekondus. Further, various studies report that the socio-economically disadvataged children (gecekondu children), score less on intellectual and cognitive developmental evaluations (Ataman & Epir 1972; Şemin 1975; Özgediz 1979).

RESEARCH IN CONTEXT:

A research, conducted by the current author in 1982 in four selected gecekondu settlements in Ankara, reveals the reasons for underachievement of the gecekondu children (Ülküer 1983). Nominal group processing(Delbecq & Van Der Ven) was used to collect data ; interest groups were a) mothers of four, five and six years old gecekondu children, and b) the teachers of the first year primary school gecekondu children in selected gecekondu settlements.

The reasons for underachievement of gecekondu children:

The interest groups have identified ten major areas of difficulty which cause underachievement among gecekondu children.

Teacher's Reasons:

1. Poor physical and psycho-motor development of the children. They are not able to use their small muscles even for holding a pencil, cutting a paper and so on.
2. Low educational, social, cultural levels of the parents,
3. Poor diet and eating habbits.
4. Not having early school experience.
5. Lack of parental interest in their children's education.
6. Children lack cleaning habbits and tidiness.
7. Parents cannot afford to meet school expenses. Thus, children come to school without books, note-books, pencils etc.
8. The school too, lack necessary teaching aids.
9. The children are extremely disobedient and badly

behaved.

10. Physical conditions of gecekondus are not suitable for studying (to prepare homework etc.)

These characteristics of gecekondu children resemble very much to the Chazan's (1973) conceptualization of the "slum child".

Mothers' Reasons:

Mothers reported the following difficulties which result in disadvantaged conditions for the gecekondu parents and for their children;

1. Not knowing what to do when the child is sick, not least, because taking to the doctor means spending money that they cannot afford.
2. They cannot afford to buy essential food such as milk, eggs and meat.
3. Jealousy and envy among siblings and friends.
4. Cleaning and washing in the gecekondu are not regular as there is no running water in the gecekondu and stand pipes in the street do not always work.
5. Children pick up bad behavior patterns in the neighbourhood.
6. The children of six years old (they are the first year primaryschool children) are not interested in school and in study; and the parents seem to have little control over them.
7. The six year olds often do not want to go to school at all
8. The teachers are not interested in educating their children. The teachers do not seem to pay enough attention to the children.
9. The mothers are anxious about the future of their children.
10. Finally, the mothers are fully aware of the effect of gecekondu environment of their children's social, psychological and emotional development. But they seem to have no answer to it. (It can be assumed that the mothers feel themselves helpless.)

The problems identified by mothers and teachers interest groups, can be examined in four dimensions; a) urban services, gecekondu lacks regular, water, electricity and public transport etc.; b) Social-health and cutural services: Mother-child health care centres are usually out of reach, there is no playgrounds for children and so on. c) Education opportunities: According to the teachers, parents are not interested in the education of their children. However, parents do not lack interest in their children's education, but they lack educational experiences that they don't know how to help their children. Further, there seem to be a possibility that because of their unaccepted behaviors and outlook; the gecekondu children can be under-rated by their teachers. Such possibility can double the effect of their disadvantaged conditions on the educational achievment. d) Economic Dimensions: The major difficulty arises from the low economic level of the gecekondu families.

Such conditions of the gecekondus will give inevetable support to the 'underachievement' among the gecekondu children. Thus, the poverty will cycle from one generation to other, forming a uniqe culture which may be referred as "culture of poverty"(Lewis 1966).

Head Start in Turkish Gecekondu:

In order to break the povery cycle in gecekondus, provision of preschool education was proposed by Şemin(1975) that its model was based on 'traditional preschool education' and/or 'compensatory education' (Zigler & Valentine 1979; Bloom 1965).

Provision of pre-school education for the disadvantaged childeren through Head Start is not a new phonemena in the United States of America or in other industrialised societies that they experienced rural-urban migration and slum problems more than a century ago (Ülküer 1983). Therefore, taking the lesson from these experienced countries, and examining the literature on Head Start Preschool and/or Early Childhood Education models (Bronfenbrenner 1974); "Ecological Early Childhood Educational Model" which takes the child's day- to-dey environment into account, seems to be suitable to the conditions of gecekondu.

Ecological early childhood education model in Turkish

Gecekondu:

Ecological model of early childhood education can be organised in five sequential stages:

1. Before the children are born:

The provision of adequate housing and economic security of the family is essential before the child is born. This should be secured through Government's social and health care schemas.

2. Preparation for parenthood:

The basic aim of this stage is to give essential information about child care, nutrition and health care to parents. In gecekondu settlements, the mother-child health care cenres seem to be the suitable places for conveying such information. In these centres; in addition to doctor, nurses and dietitian, there should be an expert in child development and education. Preparation for parenthood programs can also be run at adult education centres(halk eğitim merkezleri) The parents meetings can be organized in these centres that these meetings provide opportunities for pregnant mothers to talk about their every kind of problems related to their pregnancy, as well as for talks on physical and psychological health care of pregnant mothers. Trained preschool teachers can achieve the goals of this stage providing that, a) the teacher has further training and information about the basic principles of the ecological model and b) sincerely accepted them.

3. The first three years of life:

The basic aim of this stage is to establish a reciprocal interaction in child-parent relationship. This can be done by arranging activities that would be challenging to parents and to the child. At this stage, daycare centres may be needed. This kind of daycare cenres have two purposes; one is to serve mothers who need to work and have nobody to look after her child. Second, is to serve as an early childhood education centres where teachers prepare their programs and materials before they visit the mothers in their homes. Sometimes, mothers with their children can be invited to the centres where the wider range of activities can be performed.

4. Ages four through to six:

The aim of this stage is to expose the children to more cognitively oriented pre-school programmes along with the continuing parental intervention.

5. Ages six through twelve:

At the age of six; the children start their elementary schooling. At this stage, it is aimed at helping the child and his family to adapt to the formal education system. The basic aim of this stage is to insure parental support of the child's educational activities at home and at school.

CONCLUSION:

The proposed ecological early childhood education model seem to be suitable for the conditions and/or characteristics of the gecekondu people. However, implication of the model may result in various problems and may require further adjustments. Some of the requirement may be listed as follows:

1. Adaquately designed low-cost housing projects which should not only meet the current demand but account for further demand in gecekondus are required. In the same way, an immediate governmental policy is required to ensure a minimum income and/or supplementary benefits for the families with children of inadequate income.
2. Further research within the framewok of ecological model is needed to define the strategies, targets and educational activities of the programs.
3. The teacher who will be working in the application of the ecological model should be aware of the basic principles of the model. Further however, they should have accepted them sincerely. Thus, additional inservice teacher training courses are needed.
4. Financial resources are also essential for inaguration of the program. Therefore, careful analysis of the finacial needs of the program is needed.

CURRENT RESEARCH

As a follow up; a longitudinal Research Project was initiated in Spring 1988 in selected gecekondu settlements in Ankara (Ülkü er, et all. 1988). Preliminary surveys for 'needs assesment' indicate that the gecekondu children and their families are still in similar problems idetified in previous research. Therefore; the Research Project which aims at putting 'the ecological early childhood educational model' as outlined above, into practice was started

with group of six months pregnant mothers (the stage of " preparation for parenthood"), and with group of mothers of newborn babies (the stage of " first three years of life"). The first reports of the research project will be completed by September 1988.

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